Postwar statebuilding in Burundi: ruling party elites and illiberal peace

NTAGAHORAOHO Z. BURIHABWA AND DEVON E. A. CURTIS*

Postwar statebuilding can follow many different trajectories.\(^1\) In many cases, violent conflict is fought at least in part over the control of the state and the distribution of resources, so it is not surprising that the question of which rules, structures and institutions should govern post-conflict political life is hotly contested. While there is broad variation in terms of actual statebuilding practices in postwar environments, since the end of the Cold War the emphasis in the UN and other multilateral institutions has been on support for liberal statebuilding, as part of broader UN peacebuilding frameworks. Liberal statebuilding usually includes the consolidation of order on the basis of representative government, accountability, constitutional limits on governmental power, and respect for civil and political rights.\(^2\)

Among scholars, there has been extensive debate over the ideas and practices associated with liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding. The more positive views of the 1990s have since been tempered by serious questions about both the ideas and the assumptions underlying international statebuilding, as well as its practical record. Experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, in particular, raised questions about the feasibility of internationally supported liberal statebuilding. Among international commentators, earlier enthusiasm about the possibilities of international liberal statebuilding as a form of peacebuilding in Africa has subsided. The focus has shifted away from the state towards other forms of peacebuilding, including ‘local’ or hybrid peacebuilding and community resilience.\(^3\) Meanwhile, others

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\(^*\) We would like to thank Andrew Dorman, Andrea Filipi and two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments on this article. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations. Ntagahoraho Z. Burihabwa’s contributions to the article are based on his earlier PhD research.

\(^1\) The OECD has defined statebuilding as ‘an endogenous process to enhance capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state driven by state-society relations’: OECD, *State building in situations of fragility: initial findings* (Paris: OECD Development Assistance Committee, 2008). At a more general level, statebuilding can be seen as the consolidation of ‘the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained’: see Timothy Mitchell, ‘The limits of the state: beyond statist approaches and their critics’, *American Political Science Review* 85: 1, 1991, pp. 77–96 at p. 78.


have pointed to the increased prevalence of ‘non-liberal’ statebuilding that tends to privilege autocratic ruling elites. The commitment to and future of liberal democracy are being questioned by many people across the world, including in established democracies, so it is an opportune time to ask whether the era of internationally supported liberal statebuilding in post-conflict countries is over.

Burundi is often seen as an indicative case for international intervention. This small country in the Great Lakes region of Africa has suffered from waves of violence at various times throughout its post-independence period, often expressed along ethnic lines. Democratic elections were held in 1993, but the newly elected president was killed three months after taking office, leading to a civil war and a large number of international and regional conflict resolution initiatives. The Arusha peace agreement signed in 2000 paved the way to a transitional government and eventually to multiparty elections in 2005. It also formed the basis of a new Burundian constitution.

While the peace process in Burundi certainly faced difficulties, it was commonly interpreted as a successful example of internationally and regionally supported peacebuilding and statebuilding, particularly since the region had been so volatile since the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Large-scale violence in Burundi had ended, ethnic divisions appeared to be less salient, and the new constitution contained important power-sharing provisions. If the causes of conflict in Burundi had been exclusive governance, corruption, and state capture by a narrow elite, the Arusha agreement offered a new democratic promise, inclusive institutional arrangements and greater accountability of political elites. The Burundian peace process was therefore widely celebrated by outside observers as an ambitious, comprehensive effort to transform the state itself and relations between different identity groups within it. The 2005 democratic elections brought the National Council for the Defense of Democracy–Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) to power, thus seemingly ushering a real change in Burundi’s political landscape, as the CNDD-FDD had been the largest rebel movement during the civil war. Meanwhile, a vibrant civil society including a free media, an active opposition, and an open discussion of ethnicity and inclusive political institutions took root.

Nevertheless, since 2005 statebuilding in Burundi has veered away from some of these principles. Following its electoral victory in 2005, the CNDD-FDD has gradually consolidated its power. Statebuilding in Burundi was not abandoned,
but took a different form from that envisaged during the Arusha process. Rather than inclusion, transparency and liberal principles, the CNDD-FDD ruled with an increasingly authoritarian bent. Matters came to a head in 2015, when the late President Pierre Nkurunziza ran for, and won, a controversial third term in office. His candidacy was met with mass protests, an attempted coup, electoral controversy and a further clamping down on the opposition. The 2015 crisis has been interpreted as a key moment in the drift away from liberal principles towards more authoritarian governance. By the time of the 2020 elections, political space had narrowed further, and the electoral process was marred by allegations of irregularities and fraud. Those elections in 2020 were won by Évariste Ndayishimiye, President Nkurunziza’s successor in the CNDD-FDD.

What can we learn about statebuilding from the experience of Burundi? What accounts for this apparent shift from the promise of liberal state reform underpinning the Arusha peace process and the 2005 constitution to a more coercive type of statebuilding pursued by the CNDD-FDD, encapsulated in the 2015 crisis? What does this mean for the future of internationally supported statebuilding?

We make two interrelated claims. First, we argue that it is a mistake to contrast international liberal statebuilding efforts with Burundian illiberal statebuilding practices. This was not a case of a well-intentioned ‘liberal international community’ encountering an opportunistic, non-ideological, illiberal former rebel party. Such a view misrepresents both international and Burundian agency. Instead, we show that there is a diversity of views within and outside Burundi regarding the appropriate nature of the state and its governance practices. Second, we focus on domestic politics and argue that, in order to understand the trajectory of postwar statebuilding in Burundi, we must understand the internal dynamics and contestations within the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD. We highlight the multiple currents within the CNDD-FDD and argue that the 2015 crisis was the result of these political and ideological contestations, rather than a blanket rejection of liberal principles by new Burundian elites.

The article proceeds by first looking at widespread explanations for the failures of internationally supported statebuilding. These explanations often rely upon an explicit or implicit distinction between the liberal intentions and visions of the intervenors and the illiberal tendencies of rulers in recipient states. Building on the work of scholars who have rejected these dichotomies, we emphasize the range of views about statebuilding that exist among both international and domestic actors. We then turn to the case of Burundi, and argue that its statebuilding trajectory is mainly the result of political contestation within the ruling CNDD-FDD party. We highlight how internal divisions and fragmentation within the CNDD-FDD led to the 2015 crisis in Burundi, which was an important moment on the country’s statebuilding path, and we critically assess international responses to this crisis. We conclude with reflections on what this means in Burundi and elsewhere, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of the domestic politics of statebuilding.
International statebuilding and its apparent demise

The Arusha peace agreement in Burundi was signed in 2000, at the heyday of enthusiasm for international peacebuilding, in which the promotion of liberal statebuilding was a ubiquitous feature. The Arusha agreement exemplified these liberal principles. By the time of the contested Burundian elections of 2015, some of these liberal elements were being steadily eroded, coinciding with a moment in history at which many commentators were proclaiming the end of liberalism itself, as well as the failures of (liberal) international statebuilding.

It is therefore tempting to interpret the statebuilding trajectory in Burundi as the result of inevitable, fundamental flaws that were seen to beset efforts elsewhere in the world as well. These flaws are usually ascribed to a mismatch between the liberal institutions being promoted by international actors and the actual politics on the ground in countries emerging from conflict. According to dominant views, the problem is that approaches to statebuilding are based upon ideal-type western state models which are not appropriate in many post-conflict settings, particularly in Africa. This may be due to different cultures, or different historical developments, or a failure to engage with what people in post-conflict countries actually want or need. Several authors have shown that liberal state institutions are never introduced into a vacuum; rather, they interact with a range of pre-existing formal and informal institutions. Some commentators have pointed out that liberal institutions and practices promoted by international organizations and donors coexist alongside neo-patrimonial structures of political authority, leading to statebuilding outcomes that do not correspond to donor expectations. Rather, the outcomes often closely resemble authoritarian rule, under a façade of governance by liberal institutions. Applied to the Burundi case, this interpretation would view the Arusha peace agreement as the embodiment of liberal international statebuilding. When the liberal institutions and practices set up by the agreement were superimposed on to the existing political landscape in Burundi, the result was hybrid authoritarianism, in which governance practices retained some formal elements of liberal democracy while drifting towards authoritarian control.

This reading of the failure of internationally supported statebuilding in Burundi and elsewhere is flawed. It relies upon a false dichotomy between

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9 Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, Africa works: disorder as political instrument (London: Currey, 1999).
12 See e.g. Richmond, Failed statebuilding; Patricia Daley, ‘Ethnicity and political violence in Africa: the challenge to the Burundi state’, Political Geography 25: 6, 2006, pp. 657–79.
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liberal western outside intervenors and illiberal ‘locals’, and reifies the notion of hierarchical difference.\(^{13}\) It assumes that difference can be overcome by ‘development’, recalling the arguments put forward by the modernization theorists of the 1960s,\(^ {14}\) or that liberal institutions are not appropriate for certain countries for other reasons. The logic of these arguments has led to the greater acceptance of statebuilding blueprints that rely upon authoritarian principles such as control of information, militarized spatial politics and the repression of opposition.\(^ {15}\)

This interpretation of the failures of international statebuilding is problematic, in terms of both its assumptions that western intervenors promoting statebuilding are liberal, and its assumptions that ‘local’ elites prefer an illiberal state. On the first point, several scholars have shown that outside actors promoting statebuilding are not homogeneous, and that there is no universal consensus in favour of liberal institutions and practices. Even though multilateral institutions and western donors profess an attachment to liberal statebuilding, there is no consensus about exactly what this means, and these stated ideals are often in tension with other objectives.\(^ {16}\) Furthermore, a number of scholars question whether international actors supporting statebuilding are themselves guided by liberal principles, likening international statebuilding to the pursuit of imperialism and control on the basis of geopolitical interests, with liberalism serving as ideological legitimation for hierarchical and coercive interventionist practices.\(^ {17}\) Other authors argue that international statebuilding relies on problematic knowledge claims, according to which it is assumed that social relations can be mapped, known and acted upon by outsiders, with predictable, knowable or malleable results.\(^ {18}\)

The assumption that local elites are illiberal is equally problematic. Much of the literature on statebuilding does not pay sufficient attention to domestic politics. When domestic politics are taken into account, many frameworks rely on rationalist logics, whereby domestic elites are assumed to make calculable individual cost–benefit calculations, which set the ‘price’ for their loyalty.\(^ {19}\) From a rationalist perspective, it is logical to infer that ruling domestic elites may incline towards authoritarian statebuilding to consolidate and maximize their power and

\(^{13}\) Sabaratnam shows how even critical peacebuilding scholars tend to reproduce the ontological distinction between the ‘liberal’ and ‘the local’: Meera Sabaratnam, ‘Avatars of Eurocentrism in the critique of the liberal peace’, Security Dialogue 44: 1, 2013, pp. 259–78.

\(^{14}\) Samuel P. Huntington, Political order in changing societies (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).


\(^{19}\) See e.g. Alex de Waal, ‘Mission without end? Peacekeeping in the African political marketplace’, International Affairs 85: 1, 2009, pp. 99–113. Much of the literature on power-sharing institutional design is also based upon assumptions about ‘rational’ individual self-interest.
continued dominance. In cases of ruling parties that originated in rebel movements, arguments are sometimes made about the illiberal tendencies of former rebel elites arising from their military legacies or their wartime institutional structures. 20

Certainly it essential to bring domestic politics to the centre of any understanding of statebuilding; but it should not be viewed merely through the lens of individual rationalist opportunistic calculations or wartime legacies. In the Burundian case, authors have characterized the statebuilding space as one of subversion and appropriation, frictional encounters and political struggle. 21 We build on these insights to show how ruling domestic elites operate within power relations under specific historical conditions. Ideas of representative government and civil and political rights are not the monopoly of western liberals, nor are westerners the sole authors of such ideas. 22 There are many leaders across the world with authoritarian tendencies, and many others who articulate visions of state and society that reflect liberal principles. Such commitments are not necessarily fixed, but nor are they necessarily malleable by outsiders in knowable ways. Thus, state-building trajectories reflect a complex constellation of ideas, power relations and interactions.

This article brings an account of domestic politics to the centre of an understanding of statebuilding trajectories. As an illustration of this complexity, the article highlights the diversity of views among Burundian elites within the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD. The CNDD-FDD has dominated the political landscape in Burundi since 2005, and the internal politics of the ruling party is the key driver of Burundi’s postwar statebuilding trajectory. 23 While CNDD-FDD elites are typically viewed as authoritarian or illiberal, we show that senior figures within the CNDD-FDD did not express unified views in favour of illiberal state practices; on the contrary, there were key political differences within the CNDD-FDD. Thus, the drift to a more authoritarian version of statebuilding was contingent upon CNDD-FDD power relations, but this was not inevitable or irreversible, and did not signal the existence of an immutable illiberal Burundian ‘local’ position, resisting ‘foreign’ liberal ideas.


23 Other actors, including regional actors and Burundian opposition parties, also played important roles, but a detailed discussion of these is beyond the scope of this article.
Statebuilding in Burundi and the CNDD-FDD

The creation of the CNDD-FDD was rooted in the country’s post-colonial statebuilding pathway, which unfolded in three major phases. The first was Burundi’s initial post-colonial statebuilding framework, a constitutional monarchy, which did not resolve conflict between the two main ethnic groups, the Hutu and Tutsi. While dating back to pre-colonial political and social inequalities, conflict was amplified by colonial policies, especially those of Belgium.\(^\text{24}\) The second statebuilding phase followed a series of high-level political assassinations and mass killings in the immediate aftermath of independence in 1962, eventually culminating in the emergence of a Tutsi-dominated military dictatorship. Heralded by a military coup in 1966, this second statebuilding phase was further consolidated through the 1972 genocide of up to 300,000 Hutu, and the purging of Hutu from government.\(^\text{25}\) Hutu would remain systematically excluded from the educational system, the civil service and the army, and their everyday experience of oppression under a Tutsi hegemony reinforced a collective awareness of victimhood.\(^\text{26}\)

The third phase of Burundi’s post-colonial statebuilding was characterized by a series of largely ineffective power-sharing arrangements and a failed democratization process between 1988 and 1993. These changes were triggered by internal and external pressures following renewed inter-ethnic massacres in 1988. Having been largely excluded from state structures since 1965, Hutu were progressively re-integrated. This process gained further momentum after the end of the Cold War, as Burundi’s third Tutsi military ruler, Pierre Buyoya, initiated a democratization process under international pressure.\(^\text{27}\) Multiparty elections held in June 1993 were won by a new political party, Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU), whose leader, Melchior Ndadaye, subsequently became the country’s first democratically elected and first Hutu president. However, this change was short-lived: President Ndadaye was assassinated only months later, on 21 October 1993, during a failed coup mounted by the Tutsi-dominated army. This event triggered Burundi’s civil war and the creation of the rebel movement, the CNDD-FDD.

The CNDD-FDD was formally created on 24 September 1994 in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC; at that time Zaire). The main elements of its political wing, the CNDD, comprised a group of former members of FRODEBU, headed by Ndadaye’s former interior minister and the CNDD-FDD’s first leader, Léonard Nyangoma. A second important group included young Hutu officers who had deserted Burundi’s military academy, the Institut Supérieur des Cadres Militaires (ISCAM), and gone on to lead the military FDD wing commanded by Jean-Bosco Ndayikengurukiye. A third group consisted of former

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\(^{27}\) The most prominent example of this international pressure was expressed at the 1990 Franco-African summit of La Baule by the then French president François Mitterrand, who made it clear that further support of (Francophone) African countries would be assessed on the basis of their achievements towards democratization. See Marc Manirakiza, *Burundi: quand le passé ne passe pas (Buyoya I–Ndadaye) 1987–1993* (Brussels: Longue Vue, 2002), p. 41.
members of the Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People (PALIPEHUTU), a different Hutu rebel movement that had been created in exile in Tanzania in 1980. This latter group switched allegiance to the nascent CNDD-FDD, and included future presidents Pierre Nkurunziza and Évariste Ndayishimiye, among other key figures who later played critical roles in postwar politics in Burundi. 28

Over time, internal fragmentation within the CNDD-FDD increased, often reflecting regional divisions, divisions between ‘politicians’ in the CNDD political leadership and ‘fighters’ in the FDD military command, and divisions between ‘insiders’—fighting the armed struggle within Burundi—and ‘outsiders’ based abroad. These fractures were exacerbated by a gradual marginalization of the movement’s founding political ideology and intellectuals, as well as a very high level of internal violence and killings. 29

These patterns of internal conflict within the movement were important catalysts for two leadership changes during the rebellion. In 1998, the CNDD-FDD founder and first leader Nyangoma was deposed by his military chief of staff Ndayikengurukiye, who was himself removed in 2001 after initiating monumental reforms that fully integrated the political CNDD wing and military FDD branch into a hybrid leadership structure. Ndayikengurukiye’s removal was orchestrated by the ex-PALIPEHUTU faction. 30 The new leaders retained the integrated politico-military leadership structures introduced by Ndayikengurukiye and later signed the comprehensive ceasefire agreement with the Burundian transitional government in 2003. This paved the way for the CNDD-FDD’s transformation from a rebel movement into a political party in 2004 and its eventual electoral victory in 2005.

However, even after the war had ended, the CNDD-FDD as a political party remained divided, and there were disagreements over statebuilding strategies, including disagreements over the extent to which the CNDD-FDD should deviate from the principles set out in the Arusha agreement. Further contention revolved around how much to cooperate with opposition groups, how much press freedom should be allowed, and how much to engage with civil society and international partners. 31 In terms of factions, there were tensions between those who had been active inside Burundi during the armed struggle and others who had supported the CNDD-FDD while in exile. 32 Several of the latter seem to have favoured more liberal statebuilding approaches. These divisions were compounded by tensions

30 This faction was led by Pierre Nkurunziza, Hussein Radjabu, Adolphe Nshimirimana, Évariste Ndayishimiye, Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni and Silas Ntigurirwa.
31 At a party congress in 2006, the CNDD-FDD chairman Hussein Radjabu issued a directive instructing party members to stop talking to civil society actors and the media. See Willy Nindorera, ‘Burundi: the deficient transformation of the CNDD-FDD’, in Jeroen de Zeeuw, ed., From soldiers to politicians: transforming rebel movements after civil war (London: Lynne Rienner, 2008).
32 For instance, former Senate president and second vice-president Gervais Rufyikiri had been the wartime CNDD-FDD representative in Belgium.
between the ‘old’ militants of the ex-rebel movement and ‘new’ members who joined the political party after the war, sometimes out of political expediency.

Furthermore, the ‘politicians’ vs ‘soldiers’ antagonism now pitted civilian CNDD-FDD politicians against the former FDD rebel commanders who had taken up roles in the national security sector, supposedly without political affiliations. The civilians criticized the military leaders’ reluctance to adapt to peacetime politics and loosen their tight grip on the new party.\(^{33}\) Eventually, those factions inclining towards a more coercive power politics gained the upper hand over those who articulated a more liberal, inclusive vision, owing in part to their ability to back up their ideas with force.\(^{34}\) In essence, this meant that the group more open to developing and implementing a rights-based, accountable statebuilding vision for Burundi was set against an ‘old guard’ that primarily emphasized their entitlement to power as liberators and focused on pragmatic approaches to consolidating this power. However, it is also important to note that the fault-line between the two groups was not fixed, but on the contrary was sometimes rather blurred, with positions shifting on the basis of political, economic and other considerations.\(^{35}\)

There were already some signs of a drift towards more authoritarian governance in the early years of the CNDD-FDD’s rule. One manifestation of this was the reliance on the use of force, which can also be traced to divisions within the CNDD-FDD. When the new president Pierre Nkurunziza took office in 2005, he was quick to capitalize on an imbalance between CNDD-FDD heavyweights in the civilian party and those in the security sector, forging an alliance with powerful ex-FDD generals in the army and police.\(^{36}\) Nkurunziza’s collaboration with ‘the generals’ would come to constitute the informal inner circle of power. Referred to as the ‘CNDD-FDD system’, this inner circle would become Nkurunziza’s main means of controlling the CNDD-FDD political party through state structures. As shown below, this had important ramifications for Burundi’s postwar statebuilding trajectory.

The 2015 crisis as a key period in Burundian statebuilding

The divisions within the CNDD-FDD continued to intensify through the 2010 elections, which were won by the party amid further claims that the country was distancing itself from the liberal statebuilding ideals underpinning the Arusha

\(^{33}\) Formal participation by security sector actors in political parties is prohibited by Burundian law, but the increased influence of the ex-FDD generals in the de facto politico-military command structures of the party—most notably as members of the Conseil des Sages—was internally legitimized by article 10 of the party statutes. This states that all activists of the CNDD-FDD movement until its conversion to a political party on 8 Aug. 2004 are considered founding members of the party, which therefore included the ex-FDD actors who had joined the security sector after the war. See Burihabwa, *Continuity and contingency*, p. 522.

\(^{34}\) Burihabwa and Curtis, ‘The limits of resistance ideologies?’.

\(^{35}\) Individuals with more liberal orientations sometimes changed their views in response to circumstances, just as some fighters with more authoritarian tendencies eventually adopted a more liberal outlook. Author interview with former senior political CNDD-FDD leader and official, Bujumbura, Jan. 2013.

\(^{36}\) Most of the top leadership of the CNDD-FDD rebel movement became integrated into the security sector rather than joining the new political party as civilian politicians. Nkurunziza and Radjabu were notable exceptions.
agreement.\textsuperscript{37} An example of this was the increased visibility of the CNDD-FDD’s youth wing, Imbonerakure, which used tactics of intimidation against individuals and communities perceived as enemies, most notably militants and supporters of the Forces nationales de libération (FNL), sometimes in close coordination with the local administration and the police.\textsuperscript{38}

The movement towards more coercive and authoritarian statebuilding practices was intensified by additional drivers in the lead-up to the crisis of 2015. That crisis revolved around whether or not President Nkurunziza could run for a third term in office.\textsuperscript{39} For many advocates of liberal statebuilding, a third term went against the principles of the Arusha agreement and the 2005 constitution, and would thus undermine the governance ideals underpinning the peace process. Within the ‘CNDD-FDD system’, several key ex-FDD generals supported Nkurunziza’s desire to run for a third term. Determined to safeguard the CNDD-FDD’s political power as well as their related personal assets, these generals believed that a continued Nkurunziza presidency would be a source of stability and protection. They therefore wanted to see a persistent shift towards more control over the levers of power and less room for dissenting oppositional voices and views, including less criticism from within the CNDD-FDD. This was exacerbated by a world-view that rejected the Arusha peace agreement and certain aspects of the 2005 constitution.\textsuperscript{40} Other CNDD-FDD elites were unsympathetic to the Arusha agreement on the grounds that the CNDD-FDD had not participated in the negotiations that led to the 2000 agreement that in turn served as the basis for the 2005 constitution.\textsuperscript{41} The CNDD-FDD only participated in ceasefire negotiations after the signing of the Arusha peace agreement and the establishment of transitional institutions. Paradoxically, this meant that key figures within the CNDD-FDD lacked a meaningful commitment to Burundi’s post-conflict statebuilding architecture, which it was mandated to govern and protect following its election to power in 2005.\textsuperscript{42}

While the 2015 dispute focused on President Nkurunziza’s eligibility to run for a third term in office, it also reflected an internal ‘CNDD-FDD system’ conflict. This pitted those within the party who objected to the third term against Nkurunziza loyalists, both within the CNDD-FDD party and among ex-FDD security actors. Signs of this fault-line could already be seen in October 2013, when a proposal to


\textsuperscript{38} The FNL was another predominantly Hutu rebel movement that had fought in the civil war. It later became a political party and has become the biggest opposition party in Burundi. See Burundi Human Rights Initiative, \textit{A façade of peace in a land of fear: behind Burundi’s human rights crisis} (2020), https://burundihri.org/english/index.html#.January-2020.


\textsuperscript{40} For a similar view, see Pierre Claver Ndayicariye, \textit{Burundi 2015: chronique d’un complot annoncé} (Cape Town: Compress.dd, 2020), pp. 18–20. This was expressed not as a rejection of democracy but as a rearticulation of democracy that would require mass education (p. 43).

\textsuperscript{41} Although some CNDD-FDD leaders may have been opposed to the liberalism underpinning the Arusha accords, others were not; and in any case, this opposition was largely framed as an issue of exclusion and lack of participation. See Gervais Rufyikiri, ‘The postwartime trajectory of CNDD-FDD party in Burundi: a façade transformation of rebel movement to political party’, \textit{Civil Wars} 19: 2, 2017, pp. 220–48.

\textsuperscript{42} Rufyikiri, ‘The postwartime trajectory of CNDD-FDD party in Burundi’.

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revise the constitution was introduced in the council of ministers. This was widely perceived as an attempt to facilitate the constitutionality of Nkurunziza’s bid for a third term. A corresponding motion was eventually rejected by just one vote in the National Assembly on 21 March 2014.\textsuperscript{43} The assembly’s president, CNDD-FDD’s Pie Ntavyohanyuma, refused to manipulate the vote despite coming under pressure to do so from Nkurunziza loyalists.\textsuperscript{44} This outcome prompted those opposed to a third term for Nkurunziza to try to find an alternative presidential candidate within the CNDD-FDD. In response, loyalist ex-FDD security sector actors started fine-tuning plans to ensure Nkurunziza’s third term, including through intelligence operations aimed at uncovering critics in the CNDD-FDD ranks.\textsuperscript{45}

Given the nature of the ‘CNDD-FDD system’, it was clear that Nkurunziza would perceive internal opposition from ex-FDD generals as posing the biggest threat to his plans. As early as 2011, it appeared that there were key figures in the CNDD-FDD system who were committed to upholding the Arusha agreement, a position that was interpreted by some other CNDD-FDD insiders as insincere.\textsuperscript{46} By 2013, President Nkurunziza’s strategy of sidelining his most influential critics was clearly in evidence.\textsuperscript{47} Former army chief of staff Major General Godefroid Niyombare expressed a commitment to the Arusha framework when he explained his reservations regarding Nkurunziza’s third-term bid, and he was joined by other influential ex-FDD generals. The emergence of this group of generals opposed to the third term coincided with an increasing frustration among other ex-FDD generals about the influence, power and economic benefits enjoyed by some within Nkurunziza’s inner circle, notably the head of the national intelligence service (SNR), the late Adolphe Nshimirimana, and chef de cabinet and future prime minister Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni.\textsuperscript{48}

In response to these dynamics, Nkurunziza agreed to measures to that would somewhat appease these critics (généraux frondeurs), while in reality retaining the influence of Nshimirimana and Bunyoni. These measures included a presidential decree of 28 November 2014 replacing Nshimirimana with Godefroid Niyombare as the head of the SNR. Nshimirimana was moved to the presidency as a counsellor and Bunyoni was reappointed as permanent secretary of the National Security Council.

Shortly after Niyombare’s appointment, a confidential report drafted on 13 February 2015 by the SNR was leaked. The report advised President Nkurun-
ziza not to run for a third term, saying that his candidacy would provoke serious security risks for the country. Five days later Niyombare was dismissed from his position. 49 Another shock occurred on 1 March 2015 when the former CNDD-FDD secretary-general and strongman Hussein Radjabu escaped from Mipimba prison, suggesting the involvement of CNDD-FDD-affiliated security personnel. On 14 March 2015, a meeting of the Conseil des Sages (council of the wise) revealed that Nkurunziza did not have the necessary votes for his nomination as presidential candidate. Emboldened by these developments, 17 high-ranking CNDD-FDD politicians, spearheaded by Nkurunziza’s own spokesperson, Léonidas Hatungimana, signed a petition on 23 March 2015 demanding that the president abandon his ambition for a third term. 50

With his political future on the brink, Nkurunziza mounted a counter-attack, mobilizing key loyalists in the security sector, most notably Nshimirimana and Bunyoni, who in turn mobilized the CNDD-FDD youth wing, the Imbonerakure, alongside the police against perceived internal and external challengers. Significantly, Nkurunziza also managed to win over some of the généraux frondeurs who seemed less interested in the fate of the Arusha statebuilding framework than in their individual promotion. 51 Accusations that Rwanda was involved in fomenting opposition to Nkurunziza also helped mobilize supporters of the president, while the threat of violence served to intimidate potential opponents. 52 In a matter of weeks—by mid-April 2015—opposition to the third term had lost momentum; some of their leaders, among them Léonidas Hatungimana and Jérémie Ngendakumana, went into exile, and others rejoined the Nkurunziza camp after asking to be pardoned. 53

In a controversial decision, on 5 May 2015 the constitutional court ruled that Nkurunziza was eligible to run for a third term. The vice-president of the court said that the decision was made under duress and sought refuge in neighbouring Rwanda. 54 With the legal pathway now cleared for Nkurunziza to seek a renewed mandate, several ex-FDD elements in the security sector made a last attempt to stop him. On 13 May 2015, there was an attempted military coup launched by Niyombare, supported by a mixed group of Hutu and Tutsi officers. However, the coup collapsed just two days later. 55

Nkurunziza was eventually re-elected as president on 21 July 2015. 56 By then, the last overt critics among CNDD-FDD figures in the political sphere, Vice-President Gervais Rufyikiri and former president of the National Assembly

49 Vandeginste, ‘Legal loopholes’, p. 5.
50 Bouka and Wolters, The battle for Burundi, p. 15.
51 An example is Etienne ‘Steve’ Ntakarutimana, who succeeded Niyombare at the head of the SNR on 24 Feb. 2015.
53 Burihabwa, Continuity and contingency.
54 Bouka and Wolters, The battle for Burundi, p. 18.
Pie Ntavyohanyuma, had also gone into exile. To many, this signalled the final collapse of the liberal statebuilding vision underpinning the Arusha peace agreement. The outcome of the election sealed the victory—at least temporarily—of those CNDD-FDD elites who had come to rely on force and the suppression of opposition and dissent, in favour of more authoritarian statebuilding. Other CNDD-FDD elites who continued to express more liberal ideals, often in support of the Arusha framework, were either silenced, imprisoned or displaced into exile.

The immediate aftermath of the 2015 elections was marked by a further deterioration of the security situation. On 2 August 2015, Lieutenant General Adolphe Nshimirimana was assassinated. Several weeks later, the military chief of staff Prime Niyongabo narrowly escaped an attempt on his life. Meanwhile, statements by exiled politicians suggested that an armed group led by Major-General Godefroid Niyombare was being established. Other ex-CNDD-FDD actors, including former Vice-President Gervais Rufyikiri, were at the heart of new opposition dynamics which led to the creation of the Conseil national pour le respect de l’accord d’Arusha et de l’état de droit au Burundi (CNARED) in Addis Ababa in August 2015.

While these moves did not constitute serious threats to the CNDD-FDD government, Nkurunziza and his loyalists learned several important lessons from the 2015 crisis. These included the further need to reinforce control over the CNDD-FDD party and to continue collaborating with influential ex-FDD generals in the security sector. In March 2016, the CNDD-FDD leadership announced a countrywide ‘verification campaign’ of party organs. In August 2016, the CNDD-FDD held a party congress which introduced further reforms to centralize power. The most momentous change was the appointment of General Évariste Ndayishimiye as the new secretary-general of the party. Having been one of the généraux frondeurs, he had since been rehabilitated as military chief of staff at the presidency. By placing a general at the helm of the political party, Nkurunziza in effect formalized the politico-military ‘CNDD-FDD system’. Authoritarian practices continued; for instance, in 2017 the government imposed a contribution scheme on its citizens to fund the 2020 elections outside the formal tax system. In 2019 it shut down a human rights advocacy group operating in Burundi and arrested several independent journalists.

Despite the consolidation of increasingly authoritarian party and state-building strategies, tensions within the CNDD-FDD escalated ahead of the 2020 elections. Concerns about Nkurunziza’s plan to run for office yet again were openly voiced by influential ex-FDD security actors. Following a party congress in March 2018 during which Nkurunziza was named ‘eternal supreme guide’ of the CNDD-FDD, a group of generals apparently urged the president not to stand.
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for a fourth term. However, just as it seemed that history could repeat itself through a scenario similar to that of 2015, many were taken by surprise when the president declared he would not stand for re-election in 2020. This announcement triggered a struggle for succession within the CNDD-FDD. Following tactical manoeuvring along a blurred fault-line between pro- and anti-Nkurunziza camps throughout 2019, it was expected that the president of the National Assembly, Pascal Nyabenda, would be nominated as CNDD-FDD presidential candidate ‘by the grace of Nkurunziza’. However, a group of ex-FDD generals ultimately prevailed by mounting a determined effort on the eve of the historic party congress, which resulted in the election of Évariste Ndayishimiye as CNDD-FDD presidential candidate in January 2020.

Postwar international statebuilding support

Domestic power struggles and the internal politics of the CNDD-FDD thus influenced Burundi’s postwar statebuilding trajectory. What about the role of international actors? As described above, international and regional actors had played a prominent role in facilitating and supporting the Arusha peace process, and many international agencies and donors remained engaged in Burundi after the 2005 elections. Despite some expressions of concern about the CNDD-FDD’s governance practices, regional integration in the East African Community proceeded, and international support continued to be given to Burundi’s security sector. Burundi was a new troop-contributing country in African and international peacekeeping operations, most notably the African Union Mission to Somalia.

However, this did not prevent a steady deterioration of relations between the CNDD-FDD government and the UN, as well as bilateral relations with a number of donor countries. Several international actors criticized the CNDD-FDD’s increasingly authoritarian mode of governance, as well as the corruption, impunity, lack of accountability and clientelism that was shaping postwar Burundian statebuilding. The Burundian government in turn accused the UN and donors of challenging its sovereignty and underestimating the strong legitimacy and support the CNDD-FDD enjoyed, especially among the rural population.

60 A referendum on a constitutional amendment that extended presidential terms from five to seven years was passed in May 2018.
61 In seeking to consolidate control of the party by Nkurunziza loyalists, two of the most influential of the ‘second-generation généraux frondeurs’, Silas Ntigurirwa and Etienne ‘Steve’ Ntakarutimana, were removed from their respective positions as permanent secretary of the National Security Council and head of the SNR. Ntakarutimana was reassigned as an adviser in the presidency, while Ntigurirwa was appointed military attaché to China, a position he would never take up.
63 The role of the region as an important factor in Burundi’s statebuilding trajectory lies beyond the scope of this article, but regional geopolitical dynamics were important both in terms of influencing the strategies and decisions of key Burundian elites and also in influencing other international actors.
65 Andrea Filipi and Katrin Wittig, ‘Assuming our place in the concert of nations: Burundi as imagined in Pierre Nkurunziza’s political speeches’, unpublished article.
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The CNDD-FDD leadership complained about preferential treatment accorded to Rwanda in terms of development assistance and political support, despite authoritarian governance in Rwanda. Furthermore, it was argued, international donors did not acknowledge the longer history of authoritarianism in Burundi, including prewar patterns of governance. As relations worsened, fewer international diplomats and aid representatives were welcomed in Burundi, deepening the downward spiral by denying international actors the proximity with which to understand and meaningfully engage with the Burundian regime, including its internal dynamics.

In the lead-up to the 2015 electoral crisis, this inability to engage with the CNDD-FDD and its internal politics would prove detrimental. Many international actors focused their attention on protests in Burundi led by civil society and opposition groups, rather than seeking to respond sensitively to the complex alliances, motivations and power relations within the CNDD-FDD. International involvement was based on an overly simplistic framing of the CNDD-FDD as problematic and illiberal, and paid insufficient attention to the growing group of frondeurs from late 2014 onwards. This framing failed to capture the complexities and changing tendencies within both the opposition and the CNDD-FDD. Critically, international actors did not appreciate that certain elements within the CNDD-FDD, even among ex-FDD strongmen in the security sector, held views that were compatible with liberal forms of statebuilding.

Furthermore, there had been earlier missed opportunities, for instance in 2011, to facilitate a solution to the debate over Nkurunziza’s third mandate. International donors and diplomats vacillated between framing term limits as a matter of democracy and constitutionalism on the one hand, and adopting pragmatic positions based on political considerations on the other. This resulted in incoherent signals by international partners and enabled the Burundian government to play different external actors off against one another. Ultimately, international actors themselves did not seem to be united in favour of fully supporting liberal statebuilding, and even those that were committed to supporting a more open political space were not able to find ways to support these ideas within the CNDD-FDD.

Conclusions

The internationally supported Burundian Arusha agreement was intended to bring an end to the conflict in the country and provide liberal pillars on which to base a new era of Burundian postwar politics. The core principles underlying the statebuilding vision embodied in the Arusha agreement included ethnically based power-sharing; inclusive liberal democracy; freedom of the media, assembly and association; and civilian control of security institutions. This marked an important deviation from the exclusive, authoritarian military rule of previous decades.

in Burundi. The CNDD-FDD’s governance practices since 2005 have challenged some of these principles, and the leadership has forged a more authoritarian statebuilding path. This has happened at a time of profound, widespread global questioning of the values of multilateralism and of liberal democracy, and a disillusionment with postwar liberal statebuilding in many parts of the world. For some, the Burundian case adds to a body of evidence about the inappropriateness of liberal approaches to statebuilding in African countries emerging from conflict, and the inevitability of authoritarian control.

This article, however, has argued that these are the wrong conclusions to draw from the Burundian case. If statebuilding is flawed, it is not because of the mismatch between an international commitment to liberal principles and local elites’ rejection of these principles. The article has shown that there were a multitude of views, including liberal ones, within the CNDD-FDD. Following from this, there are three further observations that are relevant to other cases of countries emerging from conflict.

First, international actors are just as fractured and disjointed as domestic-level actors. In Burundi, many international donors were firmly committed to liberal statebuilding, and some international peacebuilding projects were attentive to local accountability. But this commitment was by no means universal, and many international actors tolerated low-intensity violence and coercive governance practices, particularly if the veneer of liberal democratic governance was upheld. Even during the peace negotiations in Arusha, liberal statemaking was contested and the long-term cessation of hostilities was not a priority for everyone. We are not seeing the ‘end’ to international liberal statebuilding, because it never fully existed in the first place. Thus this article challenges some of the critical scholarship that sees statebuilding as an unwanted foreign imposition of liberal institutions, assumptions and imagined ends; but it also challenges liberal internationalists who believe that politics is malleable, knowable, and can be engineered in predictable ways. There should be some scepticism about ‘solutionist’ thinking that intervention X will lead to outcome Y—but this is not a call for international retreat. Instead, international action should be based upon greater humility and a recognition of the mutually constituted and historically positioned character of ideas, beliefs and institutions. Understanding statebuilding means understanding a complex, intertwined, political terrain and acknowledging potential contradictions and cognitive dissonances while doing so.

Second, this article has refocused attention on domestic politics at the elite level. While there has been a recent move in the peacebuilding literature away from statebuilding and towards advocating ‘bottom-up’ community approaches, this article shows the centrality of internal debates between elites within the ruling party. This is not to say that other actors, such as international donors and diplomats, the Burundian political opposition and the wider Burundian public were

70 Daley, ‘The Burundi peace negotiations’.
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insignificant. Other actors influenced the views, calculations and positions of CNDD-FDD elites; but the arc of Burundian politics was driven by divisions within the CNDD-FDD and contests over power and ideas. Thus, a clearer understanding of the ruling party and the motivations and alliances of key elites should be at the centre of understanding statebuilding. Such an understanding does not in itself resolve the ‘problem’ of statebuilding. Indeed, both liberal and non-liberal forms of statebuilding rely upon forms of dominance over the population, albeit through different mechanisms of control. To understand the history of dispossession in countries such as Burundi it is necessary to understand why people view sources of both state and non-state authority with suspicion. Ultimately though, this is a question of state–society relations; so the ideas and practices of domestic elites must be foregrounded and understood.

Third, Burundian politics is marked by a large number of cleavages that sometimes reinforce each other but are sometimes cross-cutting. These divisions eventually came to be amalgamated and interpreted as a contest between those who were pro-Arusha (usually seen as international actors, the Burundian opposition and defectors from the CNDD-FDD) and those who were anti-Arusha (the CNDD-FDD leadership). This simplification reproduces other problematic binaries of good and bad, liberal and illiberal, moderate and hard-liner—distinctions that obscure more than they reveal. Views among different elites and among the broader population about Arusha changed depending on circumstances and over time. Indeed, some of the strongest defenders of Arusha in 2015 were Burundian politicians who had been opposed to the agreement in the early days of the peace process. Positions are not immutable, and Burundians’ commitment to different ideas and practices of statebuilding also change according to circumstances and historical conditions. The failure on the part of many international actors to understand the shifting internal politics of the CNDD-FDD led to counterproductive policies. Many international donors saw the CNDD-FDD as intransigent and failed to recognize the different alliances and views held by party elites. This made it difficult for international actors and some CNDD-FDD officials to work together in support of shared goals such as the improvement of conditions faced by Burundians and popular participation across the country.

Burundi has entered a new chapter of its postwar trajectory with the death of former President Nkurunziza in June 2020 and the inauguration of President Évariste Ndayishimiye. Many people point to the strength and resilience of the ‘CNDD-FDD system’ and believe that the statebuilding direction of the country will not change, notwithstanding the new leader, and that the trend towards a creeping authoritarianism will continue. However, it is too soon to make such a forecast. The appointment of Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni—a close collaborator

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71 This conundrum cannot be resolved by an appeal to ‘local peacebuilding’, since local peacebuilding programmes tend to be acknowledged and supported when they reinforce and coexist with national statebuilding initiatives.

of the late Pierre Nkurunziza—as prime minister has widely been interpreted as proof of a tendency towards continuity. However, this choice may also reflect an attempt by the new president to distribute power between different CNDD-FDD factions to mitigate renewed internal crisis within the party. In any case, the change in leadership in the CNDD-FDD and in the country in 2020 is a chance to reset relations. Power politics and relations of force will not disappear; but if international actors approach the CNDD-FDD with greater humility and a recognition of the possibility of different views within the party, there will be a better prospect of more inclusive and accountable statebuilding trajectories.

In all postwar countries, the creation and recreation of political orders involve a rich landscape of overlapping interests, ideas and institutions. We have shown that, in negotiating this landscape, the internal politics of the ruling party are central. Deconstructing the messy black box of internal politics is difficult, and for international actors there may be the temptation to reach quick conclusions about ‘good’ people and ‘bad’ people, or to imagine that liberal ideas can be transmitted from the West to the ‘rest’ through capacity-building workshops and institutions. A better starting-point is a recognition that ideas, principles, visions and aspirations expressed by Burundians are just like their counterparts elsewhere: they have histories, they are contested, they can be fragile and contradictory, and they can change with circumstances; but they are also meaningful and consequential.